

Professional Values in Action: Graduate Entry Nursing Students' Experiences of Clinical Placements

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Abstract

Graduate Entry Nursing (GEN) programmes have expanded nationally and internationally as accelerated pathways to address global nursing workforce shortages and diversify the professional workforce. While the existing literature documents GEN students' motivations and academic outcomes, limited attention has been given to how professional values are developed, enacted, and sustained during clinical placements, particularly in accelerated, high-pressure educational contexts. This qualitative study explores how UK-based GEN students construct and negotiate professional values during their final clinical placements, using a social constructivist lens. Data were generated through focus groups and in-depth interviews and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings reveal that professional values are not static competencies but are dynamically shaped through mentorship, organisational culture, emotional labour, and ethical tension. Students demonstrated heightened emotional awareness and resilience, drawing on prior life experiences to navigate value conflict and sustain person-centred care. Although situated within the UK, the findings offer transferable insights for transnational nursing education by highlighting the importance of structured mentorship, emotionally informed pedagogy, and value-based learning within accelerated programmes. This study contributes to international debates on professional identity formation and values-in-practice within healthcare education.

Keywords: Graduate Entry Nursing; Professional Values; Clinical Placements; Accelerated Nursing Education; Professional Identity; Transnational Education

Introduction

GEN programmes have emerged globally as a strategic response to persistent nursing workforce shortages, offering accelerated routes into the profession for individuals with prior academic qualifications and diverse professional and life experiences (Jamieson et al., 2020; MacDiarmid et al., 2021). Such programmes now operate across multiple national contexts, including the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada, and the United States of America (USA), reflecting shared international challenges related to workforce sustainability, ageing populations, and healthcare system pressures. Beyond increasing nurse supply, GEN programmes aim to attract mature, highly motivated learners who are often perceived as “practice-ready” at the point of registration (MacDiarmid et al., 2021).

Jamieson et al. (2020) suggest that while the demographic characteristics, motivations, and outcomes of GEN students are increasingly documented, qualitative understanding remains limited of how this distinct student group develops and enacts professional values within clinical placement environments. Professional values,

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including compassion, integrity, accountability, advocacy, and respect, are foundational to nursing practice and professional identity across international regulatory frameworks (Jarden et al., 2024). However, these values are not acquired solely through formal curricula; they are actively constructed, challenged, and negotiated within complex clinical and organisational contexts, particularly during practice-based learning (Ayla et al., 2018).

Clinical placements expose nursing students to real-world ethical tensions, emotional labour, and systemic constraints that can either reinforce or undermine professional values (McClunie-Trust et al., 2025). For GEN students undertaking accelerated programmes, these challenges may be intensified due to compressed timelines, early responsibility, and heightened expectations of competence. Existing research has tended to conceptualise professional values as stable attributes measured quantitatively, offering limited insight into how values are operationalised in practice, especially by mature learners whose prior experiences may influence their responses to ethical complexity (Ayla et al., 2018). This gap is particularly salient in the context of contemporary healthcare systems internationally, where staffing shortages, high workloads, and moral distress have become persistent features of clinical practice (NHS England, 2024). These pressures are not unique to the UK but are widely reported across global healthcare systems, raising essential questions about how nursing education can support value-based practice under strain. Understanding how GEN students recognise, negotiate, and sustain professional values during placements is therefore critical for informing transnational nursing education, mentorship preparation, and curriculum design.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the relationship between clinical placement experiences and the development of professional values among UK-based GEN students. Adopting a qualitative design informed by social constructivism, professional values are conceptualised not as static ideals but as dynamic practices shaped through interaction, reflection, and emotional engagement. Although situated within a UK context, the study offers transferable insights into accelerated nursing education internationally, contributing to broader debates on professional identity formation, emotional resilience, and values-in-action in transnational healthcare education.

Background:

Shafakhah et al. (2018) suggest that motivation to “help people” and “make a difference” has been consistently identified within the nursing literature as reflecting enduring professional narratives grounded in altruism, compassion, and service. Within Graduate Entry Nursing programmes, these motivations may be further shaped by prior life, academic, and professional experiences, with mature learners often bringing distinctive strengths such as resilience, emotional intelligence, ethical sensitivity, and self-directed learning (Jamieson et al., 2020; Winnington et al., 2023). Such characteristics may influence how GEN students engage in both academic



learning and clinical practice, particularly when navigating complex, ethically and emotionally demanding placement environments (Lee et al., 2020; Jarden et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding how GEN students experience, interpret, and operationalise professional values in placement learning is essential for informing educational design, mentor preparation, and support structures within accelerated nursing programmes (Nannen, 2022; Winnington et al., 2023).

Emotional awareness and emotion-management strategies are increasingly recognised as important components of professional identity development in nursing education. Emerging evidence suggests that emotional regulation may help students navigate ethical tension, sustain compassionate care, and preserve professional values within high-pressure clinical environments (Poorchangizi et al., 2019b; McClunie-Trust et al., 2025). In accelerated programmes operating across diverse healthcare systems, emotional intelligence may represent a key capability underpinning safe, reflective, and ethical practice.

Previous research has explored professional values among undergraduate nursing students (Ayla et al., 2018; Poorchangizi et al., 2019a); limited qualitative research has examined how Graduate Entry Nursing students develop and enact these values within accelerated clinical education. Existing GEN literature has primarily focused on student motivation, demographic characteristics, academic preparedness, and programme outcomes (Jamieson et al., 2020; MacDiarmid et al., 2021), with less attention given to how professional values are negotiated in practice, particularly in emotionally demanding and resource-constrained healthcare environments. This gap is significant, as professional values are central to safe, ethical, and person-centred nursing practice across international healthcare systems. This study, therefore, explores how Graduate Entry Nursing students understand, enact, and negotiate professional values during final clinical placements within an accelerated nursing programme.

Although many of these challenges are situated within specific healthcare contexts, issues such as time pressures, staffing shortages, moral distress, and value conflict are widely reported internationally. Understanding how GEN students navigate these challenges may therefore offer transferable insights for transnational nursing education, particularly in relation to supporting learners within complex clinical environments.

3 Methods

3.1 Aim and Research Question

This study explored the relationship between clinical placement experiences and the development of professional values among Graduate Entry Nursing students. The study examined how professional values were understood, enacted, and negotiated within clinical placement settings.

The research question guiding the study was:

What is the relationship between clinical placement experiences and the professional values of Graduate Entry Nursing students?

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed to enable an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences and interpretations of professional values within clinical practice. Qualitative approaches are particularly suited to examining complex, socially situated phenomena such as professional identity formation, values development, and emotional engagement in healthcare education (Aveyard, 2023).

The study was informed by a social constructivist perspective, recognising professional values as dynamic and co-constructed through interaction with others, organisational cultures, and practice environments. This epistemological stance supported the exploration of how GEN students made meaning of their placement experiences and how these experiences influenced their professional values.

3.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted at a single higher education institution in the United Kingdom offering an accelerated Graduate Entry Nursing programme. The programme is a two-year pre-registration nursing degree designed for students who already hold an undergraduate qualification in another discipline.

Participants were undertaking their final clinical placement across a range of healthcare settings, including acute hospital wards (such as Accident and Emergency and Intensive Care) and community-based nursing services. These settings provided exposure to diverse patient populations, multidisciplinary teams, and organisational contexts within the National Health Service (NHS).

3.4 Sampling Strategy and Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who were best positioned to provide rich, relevant data related to the study aim. Final-year GEN students were selected due to their extensive placement experience and proximity to professional registration.

Inclusion criteria were:

- Enrolment in the Graduate Entry Nursing programme
- Completion of, or active engagement in, the final clinical placement
- Willingness and ability to provide informed consent

Exclusion criteria were:

- Students enrolled in non-GEN nursing programmes



- GEN students not undertaking a clinical placement at the time of data collection

Phase one involved two focus groups conducted at the beginning of the final placement. Phase two comprised twelve individual semi-structured interviews conducted during the placement period. All students who participated in the focus groups were invited to take part in the interviews; however, twelve participants consented to be interviewed.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection commenced following receipt of ethical approval. All participants provided verbal and written informed consent before participating. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews facilitated both collective discussion and in-depth individual reflection. Focus groups enabled participants to explore shared meanings and experiences, while individual interviews offered opportunities to delve deeper into personal perspectives, values, and emotional responses.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility to explore emerging issues. Questions focused on participants' understanding of professional values, placement experiences that influenced these values, and how values were enacted or challenged in practice. Probing questions encouraged elaboration where appropriate. Table 1 provides a sample of the interview questions.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face within the practice setting and lasted approximately 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy. Field notes captured contextual details and non-verbal cues, and a reflective journal was maintained throughout data collection to document the researcher's observations and reflexive insights.

Table 1: Semi-structured interview guide

Semi-structured interview questions
1. What comes to mind when you think about professional values
2. What experiences influence your professional values during your clinical practice placement?
3. Did these experiences facilitate or hinder your professional values?
4. How did placement experiences complement or conflict with your professional values?

5. What professional values of a registered nurse did you observe and why?

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Thematic Analysis, following a six-phase framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach provided a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying patterns of meaning across the dataset while remaining sensitive to participants' lived experiences.

Analysis began with familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and managed using NVivo (version 12) qualitative data analysis software. Codes were then reviewed and grouped into broader categories, which informed the development of themes and subthemes. Themes were reviewed, refined, and defined through an iterative process to ensure coherence and alignment with the research question.

Both inductive and deductive coding approaches were employed, allowing themes to emerge from the data while also being interpreted in relation to existing literature and the study's theoretical perspective. Analytical memos supported reflexive engagement and documented interpretive decisions throughout the analysis.

3.7 Rigour and Trustworthiness

Rigour was ensured using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Recent discussions of qualitative rigour reaffirm Lincoln & Guba's trustworthiness framework and its operationalisation in 21st-century research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data, the use of multiple data sources (focus groups and interviews), and member checking with three participants who had indicated willingness during the consent process. Dependability was supported by maintaining detailed records of methodological and analytical decisions and by an audit trail in NVivo. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling, which documented the researcher's assumptions, decisions, and potential biases. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the study context, participant characteristics, and research processes, enabling readers to assess relevance to other settings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee as part of a Doctorate in Education programme (Ethics Review ID: ER7565989). Participants received written and verbal information outlining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.



Pseudonyms were used to protect participant anonymity, and all data were securely stored in accordance with institutional data protection policies. Audio recordings and transcripts were password-protected and accessible only to the research team. In line with institutional requirements, data will be securely retained for 5 years following study completion.

4. Findings:

4.1 Participant Characteristics

The participants in the study were aged 25 to 43 years. Ten participants identified as female and two as male. Seven participants were undertaking placements in acute care settings, including Accident and Emergency and Intensive Care. In contrast, the remaining participants were placed in non-acute hospital wards or community nursing settings. Most participants had prior healthcare-related work experience before commencing the GEN programme. Participant characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants' characteristics

Name	Age	Gender	Previous Healthcare experience	Placement
Mila	25	Female	Yes	Acute setting
Ava	29	Female	No	Acute setting
Bella	28	Female	Yes	Acute setting
Zara	28	Female	Yes	Acute setting
Tim	33	Male	No	Acute setting
Iris	28	Female	Yes	Acute setting
Chloe	36	Female	Yes	Acute setting
Evie	27	Female	Yes	Non-acute ward
Lila	43	Female	Yes	Community
Jin	26	Male	Yes	Community
Liv	35	Female	Yes	Community
Erin	28	Female	No	Community

Source: (Nannen, 2022)

4.2 Overview of Themes

Analysis of the focus group and interview data generated three overarching themes: (1) Professional Values, (2) Clinical Placement Experiences, and (3) Future Nurse Identity and Emotional Resilience. Together, these themes illustrate how GEN students understood professional values, enacted them in placement learning, and managed emotional challenges as they developed their professional identity as future registered nurses.

4.3 Theme One: Professional Values

This theme explored how GEN students conceptualised professional values and how these values were enacted in clinical practice. Two subthemes were identified: (1) Understanding Professional Values and (2) Operationalising Professional Values.

4.3.1 Understanding Professional Values

Participants demonstrated a clear and coherent understanding of professional values, frequently describing them as foundational principles guiding ethical, person-centred care. Values such as respect, compassion, advocacy, autonomy, honesty, and patient safety were consistently emphasised and framed as integral to professional nursing identity rather than abstract ideals.

Respect and dignity were commonly articulated as central to quality care, with participants describing the importance of recognising patients as individuals:

“Valuing others is really important. When you show respect to people, they feel valued... valuing the patient is very important.” (Lila)

Participants also highlighted empowerment and autonomy as essential components of professional values, particularly in supporting patients with long-term or life-altering conditions:

“Empowering the patients is really important... especially if someone has a condition that is going to affect them for the rest of their life.” (Ava)

These accounts suggest that GEN students conceptualised professional values as relational and enacted through everyday interactions, reflecting a person-centred approach aligned with professional standards.

4.3.2 Operationalising Professional Values

While the participants demonstrated strong professional value awareness, operationalising these values in practice was often described as complex and emotionally demanding. Students reported navigating challenges related to patient safety, advocacy, and honesty, particularly within hierarchical clinical environments.

Honesty and accountability, including the Duty of Candour, were repeatedly identified as core professional responsibilities:



“We’re all human, we do all make mistakes... The worst thing you can do is to deny that happening and to lie about it.” (Tim)

Advocacy was recognised as a moral obligation but also as an area requiring confidence and courage, especially when power dynamics were present:

“Stand up for what you believe in... sometimes it’s really difficult, depending on who’s above you.” (Zara)

Participants described the tension between knowing what constituted appropriate professional action and feeling confident enough to enact it:

“It takes a lot of confidence to kind of speak up... but if it’s what you believe in, I think it’s the right thing to do.” (Evie)

Despite these challenges, students consistently reaffirmed their commitment to individualised, holistic care, positioning the patient as central to decision-making:

“It’s a person who is the centre of that... and we need to support them.” (Ava)

These findings indicate that GEN students were actively engaged in translating professional values into practice, even when confronted with uncertainty and constraint.

4.4 Theme Two: Clinical Placement Experiences

This theme captured how clinical placements either reinforced or challenged participants’ professional values. Two subthemes were identified: (1) Nursing Care Experiences and (2) Engagement with Clinical Mentors.

4.4.1 Nursing Care Experiences

Participants described encountering ethical dilemmas and emotionally challenging situations that tested their understanding of autonomy, person-centred care, and professional responsibility. Decisions surrounding end-of-life care or invasive interventions were particularly challenging:

“When you’ve got somebody who’s extremely frail... and family are insisting, ‘We want you to do everything possible,’ and we’re just thinking, ‘Why?’” (Mila)

Such experiences prompted students to critically reflect on the alignment or misalignment between professional values and observed practice:

“If someone’s fighting... that means they don’t want some kind of intervention.” (Tim)

Students also reported difficulties integrating into established ward cultures, particularly where values were not openly modelled or supported:

“Coming into that from the outside was really difficult... it was cliquy.”
(Mila)

Systemic constraints, including staffing shortages and time pressures, were perceived as barriers to enacting values consistently:

“When it’s so acute and so busy... you don’t have the time to provide the kind of care that you’d like.” (Chloe)

These accounts highlight how organisational context and resource limitations influenced students’ ability to uphold professional values during placement learning.

4.4.2 Engagement with Clinical Mentors

Clinical mentors were described as pivotal in shaping students’ understanding and enactment of professional values. Positive mentorship experiences reinforced students’ commitment to professional standards and supported learning through role modelling:

“My mentor is knowledgeable, and it links in with my values.” (Erin)

Mentors who demonstrated honesty, advocacy, and reflective practice were particularly influential:

“She was happy to put her hands up when she didn’t know the answer.” (Zara)

Conversely, when mentors were perceived as task-focused or disengaged, students reported frustration and reduced learning opportunities:

“They like to just get given the tasks and tick them off.” (Zara)

Negative mentorship experiences were often associated with feelings of exclusion and limited support:

“I just felt like I was stalking her around the ward.” (Ava)

These findings suggest the importance of mentor behaviours in facilitating or constraining value-based learning during placements.

4.5 Theme Three: Future Nurse Identity and Emotional Resilience

This theme reflected how participants developed emotional awareness and coping strategies to preserve professional values and sustain their emerging professional identity. Two subthemes were identified: (1) Emotional Awareness and (2) Emotional Management Strategies.

4.5.1 Emotional Awareness Related to Professional Values

Participants demonstrated heightened emotional awareness, recognising the impact of stress, burnout, and systemic pressures on themselves and others. Observations of



staff fatigue and compromised care prompted reflection on value erosion within strained environments:

“It’s like burnout... they’ve just lost their tolerance.” (Zara)

Bella described remaining constantly alert to emotional cues while attempting to maintain professional boundaries:

“You’re constantly aware of what’s happening around you.” (Bella)

This awareness appeared to deepen their empathy and sensitivity to the emotional dimensions of nursing practice.

4.5.2 Emotion Management Related to Professional Values

To manage emotional demands, participants employed a range of cognitive and interpersonal strategies, including peer support, reflection, humour, and seeking guidance:

“It definitely helped that Jane was going through the same thing.” (Bella)

Humour and emotional distancing were used as protective strategies:

“Every patient is called Bob or Doris... it’s my dry sense of humour.” (Mila)

Participants emphasised the importance of external support networks in maintaining professionalism:

“Have your sounding board... then you can go into your workplace and be professional.” (Chloe)

These strategies enabled students to regulate their emotions while sustaining their commitment to professional values and completing placement requirements.

5. Discussion

This study extends existing GEN literature by exploring how professional values are not simply acquired through formal education but are actively constructed, challenged, and sustained through clinical placement experiences. While previous GEN research has largely focused on student motivation, demographic characteristics, and academic preparedness (Jamieson et al., 2020; MacDiarmid et al., 2021), this study demonstrates that professional values are enacted as dynamic, relational practices shaped by mentorship, organisational culture, emotional labour, and ethical complexity. These findings directly address the study’s research question by demonstrating that clinical placement experiences do not simply expose GEN students to professional values; rather, they actively shape how such values are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted within complex clinical environments.

Participants described both positive and negative placement experiences, each contributing to professional development in different ways. Positive encounters

reinforced their existing professional values and strengthened confidence, while negative experiences often served as catalysts for reflection and growth, encouraging students to reconsider and refine their future roles as registered nurses and mentors (Riklikiene et al., 2018). These findings support the view that professional values are not static competencies but evolve through reflective engagement and experiential learning.

A dominant theme emerging from the data was students' intrinsic motivation to 'help people' and 'make a difference' within nursing. This reflects a strong sense of professional purpose and a commitment to delivering compassionate, high-quality care. These motivations align with the existing literature, which positions nursing as a career grounded in altruism, compassion and service (Shafakhah et al, 2018). For many students, this commitment was deeply personal, often linked to previous experiences as patients or relatives of patients (Jamieson et al., 2020). Their professional values are therefore closely aligned with principles of patient safety, quality care, and advocacy.

Consistent with Nelwati et al. (2019), Jamieson et al. (2020) and Jarden et al. (2024), participants expressed a desire to contribute meaningfully to a diverse and evolving profession, frequently aspiring to work in acute or specialised clinical areas that require advanced skills. Central to their professional identity was the emphasis on person-centred care; however, students encountered challenges in translating these values into practice amid the realities of clinical placements. These tensions are expected, given the varied life, educational, and professional experiences GEN students bring to nursing (Stacey et al., 2015; Jamieson et al., 2020).

The role of clinical mentors emerged as a critical influence on students' internalisation and enactment of professional values, consistent with the expectations set out in the NMC Code (NMC, 2018). Participants sought alignment between their values and those of their mentors, with positive alignment fostering admiration and the perception of mentors as role models. This finding further addresses the research question by illustrating how interpersonal relationships within placement settings mediate the enactment of professional values.

Moreover, the GEN student profile described by McKenna et al. (2017), McKenna & Brooks (2018), and Jamieson et al. (2020), characterised by motivation, rapid learning, and diligence, was evident in this cohort. This supports previous research suggesting that students frequently internalise and emulate the professional values and behaviours modelled by mentors (Felstead & Springett, 2016; Kaya & Boz, 2019). The findings of this study demonstrate that GEN students clearly articulate professional values and have an advanced capacity to reflect on how these values are enacted, challenged, and sustained within clinical placement environments. Notably, professional values emerged not as fixed competencies but as evolving practices shaped through mentorship, organisational culture, emotional labour, and ethical complexity. This aligns with international literature that conceptualises professional identity formation as a socially constructed, relational process rather than an



individualised outcome (Alya et al., 2018; Poorchangizi et al., 2019a; Jarden et al., 2024).

5.1 Alignment of GEN Students' Values with the NMC Code

Participants not only demonstrated strong alignment with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Code (2018) but also embodied the core values and behaviours expected of nurses in the UK. Their approach to care reflected the four pillars of the Code: prioritising people through compassion, dignity, and person-centred care; practising effectively with competence, communication, and collaboration; preserving safety through accountability and risk management; and promoting professionalism and trust via integrity, leadership, and ethical practice. These values are foundational to cultivating safe, reflective, and compassionate nursing practitioners and align closely with the standards mandated by the NMC in today's NHS (NMC, 2018).

Importantly, the emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms demonstrated by GEN students were key to managing placement pressures. Aligning with Stacey et al. (2016), students employed both cognitive strategies, such as positive self-talk, reflective distancing, critical thinking, and situational questioning and interpersonal strategies, including seeking support from peers, family, and mentors, cultivating collegial relationships, and participating in debriefing conversations. These findings highlight the resilience and capability of mature learners in intensive programmes, emphasising their ability to recognise, reflect on, and act in accordance with their professional values, a foundation essential to their development as compassionate, reflective, and effective registered nurses.

Finally, GEN programmes continue to expand globally; this study contributes to international discussions on how professional identity and values are sustained amid intensity and constraint. By foregrounding values-in-action rather than values-as-ideals, the findings offer transferable insights applicable to nursing education across national and cultural boundaries.

6. Implications of the Study

This study has several implications for transnational nursing education and accelerated professional programmes more broadly. First, the findings demonstrate that professional values are actively constructed through immersive clinical experiences, rather than passively absorbed through formal curricula. Educational institutions delivering GEN or accelerated nursing programmes internationally should therefore prioritise pedagogical approaches that integrate reflective practice, emotional literacy, and ethical dialogue within clinical learning.

Second, mentorship emerged as a critical mechanism for developing professional values. Investment in mentor preparation, particularly in value modelling, emotional support, and inclusive teaching practices, is essential to align educational aims with clinical realities across diverse healthcare systems. Structured mentorship frameworks

may enhance consistency and transferability of value-based learning within transnational programmes.

Third, the emotional intelligence and resilience demonstrated by GEN students highlight the strengths of mature learners in navigating complex clinical environments. Educational providers should recognise and leverage these strengths by creating supportive peer networks, reflective spaces, and debriefing opportunities that enable students to process emotional experiences constructively.

7. Strengths and Limitations

This study is strengthened by its qualitative, social constructivist approach, which conceptualises professional values as dynamic and enacted through clinical practice rather than as fixed attributes. By foregrounding values-in-action, the study offers novel insights into how Graduate Entry Nursing students develop and sustain professional values within accelerated programmes. The inclusion of final-placement students, alongside focus groups and in-depth interviews, enabled rich reflection on professional identity formation at a critical point in the transition to registration.

The study also highlights the emotional dimensions of value enactment, demonstrating how emotional awareness and regulation support ethical and compassionate practice in high-pressure clinical environments. These insights are particularly relevant to accelerated nursing pathways internationally, where similar structural and emotional challenges are widely reported.

Although the sample generated rich, in-depth accounts, participants were drawn from a single institutional context, which may limit transferability to other educational or healthcare settings. In addition, the study did not explore variation in cultural, demographic, and clinical placement backgrounds. Future research in diverse educational and clinical contexts would strengthen the understanding of how professional values are constructed in different settings.

8. Conclusion

This study highlights the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between clinical placement experiences and the professional values of GEN students. Clinical placements serve as critical arenas for students to apply, test, and consolidate their values, while their existing professional values shape how they interpret and engage with clinical practice. Positive mentorship that resonates with students' values strengthens professional identity, whereas adverse experiences stimulate reflective learning and motivation to improve.

Supporting GEN students through value-based education, structured reflective practices, and effective mentorship is essential to nurturing their professional growth. Such strategies not only prepare students to deliver person-centred, ethical care but also equip them to navigate the complexities of contemporary healthcare environments with confidence and integrity.



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Consent

All participants gave written consent to participate in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The author/s declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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